

Joseph – From *Misery to Majesty* May 24, 2020

Our Savior's Way Lutheran Church
Genesis 41

Rev. Dr. Mike Ramey

"God's providential care expresses itself in wonderful and unusual ways." Alistair Begg, The Hand of God

When last we looked in on Joseph, he had interpreted the dreams of the king's chief cupbearer and the chief baker. For this, he had made only one request: that he would be remembered, and Pharaoh made aware of his plight. Genesis 40 ended with the sad report that ***"the chief cupbearer did not remember Joseph but forgot him."*** (v. 23) Yet things are about to change dramatically, for God has Joseph right where He needed him to be for the time that was coming.

If you would, please turn in your Bibles to Genesis 41 as we pick up the story of Joseph where we had left off last week. ***"After two whole years, Pharaoh dreamed that he was standing by the Nile, and behold there came up out of the Nile seven cows, attractive and plump, and they fed in the reed grass. And behold, seven other cows, ugly and thin, came up out of the Nile after them, and stood by the other cows on the bank of the Nile. And the ugly, thin cows ate up the seven attractive, plump cows. And Pharaoh awoke. And he fell asleep and dreamed a second time. And behold, seven ears of grain, plump and good, were growing on one stalk. And behold, after they sprouted seven ears, thin and blighted by the east wind. And the thin ears swallowed up the seven plump full ears. And Pharaoh awoke, and behold, it was a dream. So, in the morning his spirit was troubled, and he sent and called for all the magicians of Egypt and all its wise men. Pharaoh told***

them his dreams, but there was none could interpret them to Pharaoh.”

One might suggest that Pharaoh is proof that you should never try to go to sleep after watching *The Walking Dead*. Next thing you know, you're dreaming of zombie cows and zombie corn...Zombie-apocalypse! Sorry – my mind wandered for a second. Let's get back to the real story.

“Then the chief cupbearer said to Pharaoh, ‘I remember my offenses today. When Pharaoh was angry with his servants and put me and the chief baker in custody in the house of the captain of the guard, we dreamed on the same night, he and I, each having a dream with its own interpretation. A young Hebrew was there with us, a servant of the captain of the guard. When we told him, he interpreted our dreams to us, giving an interpretation to each man according to his dream. And as he interpreted to us, so it came about. I was restored to my office and the baker was hanged.’ Then Pharaoh sent and called Joseph, and they quickly brought him out of the pit. And when he had shaved himself and changed his clothes, he came in before Pharaoh. And Pharaoh said to Joseph, ‘I have had a dream, and there is no one who can interpret it. I have heard it said of you that when you hear a dream you can interpret it.’ Joseph answered Pharaoh, ‘It is not in me; God will give Pharaoh a favorable answer.’ Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, ‘Behold, in my dream I was standing on the banks of the Nile. Seven cows, plump and attractive, came up out of the Nile and fed in the reed grass. Seven’ [zombie cows...okay, I know that's not in there – just making sure you're awake] ‘Seven other cows came up after them, poor and very ugly and thin, such as I had never seen in all the land of Egypt. And the thin, ugly cows ate up the first seven plump cows, but when they had eaten them no one would have known that they had

eaten them, for they were still as ugly as at the beginning. Then I awoke. I also saw in my dream seven ears growing on one stalk, full and good. Seven ears, withered, thin, and blighted by the east wind, sprouted after them, and the thin ears swallowed up the good ears. And I told it to the magicians, but there was no one who could explain it to me.’ Then Joseph said to Pharaoh, ‘The dreams of Pharaoh are one; God has revealed to Pharaoh what he is about to do. The seven good cows are seven years, and the seven good ears are seven years; the dreams are one. The seven lean and ugly cows that came up after them are seven years, and the seven empty ears blighted by the east wind are also seven years of famine. It is as I told Pharaoh; God has shown to Pharaoh what he is about to do. There will come seven years of great plenty throughout all the land of Egypt, but after them will arise seven years of famine, and all the plenty will be forgotten in the land of Egypt. The famine will consume the land and the plenty will be unknown in the land by reason of the famine that will follow, for it will be very severe. And the doubling of Pharaoh’s dream means that the thing is fixed by God, and God will shortly bring it about. Now therefore let Pharaoh select a discerning and wise man and set him over the land of Egypt. Let Pharaoh proceed to appoint overseers over the land and take one-fifth of the produce of the land of Egypt during the seven plentiful years. And let them gather all the food of these good years that are coming and store up grain under the authority of Pharaoh for food in the cities and let them keep it. That food shall be a reserve for the land against the seven years of famine that are to occur in the land of Egypt, so that the land may not perish through the famine.’”

Joseph was in the right place at the right time. Back-track his story, and if anything had been different, he would not have been in a position to reveal to Pharaoh what was about to happen. God had molded Joseph for leadership through his trial and its tragedy, having framed him for this day through all the injustice he had faced. Alistair Begg observes: *“God’s providential care expresses itself in wonderful and unusual ways.”* Take a step back with me and consider the Biblical narrative from a broader perspective: If Joseph had not been sold into slavery, he would have not been found in Egypt; and if Potiphar’s wife had not lied about him, he would not have been in prison; and if he had not been in prison, he would not have been in the position to interpret either cupbearer’s or baker’s dreams; and if he had not interpreted the cupbearer’s dream, he would have not been called on to interpret Pharaoh’s dream. God’s providence led Joseph through his circumstances rather than get him out of them. Or, more to the point we’ve repeated from Paul’s letter to the Romans: ***“And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.”*** (Romans 8:28)

Returning to Genesis 41, let’s pick up at verse 37: ***“This proposal pleased Pharaoh and all his servants. And Pharaoh said to his servants, ‘Can we find a man like this, in whom is the Spirit of God?’ Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, ‘Since God has shown you all this, there is none so discerning and wise as you are. You shall be over my house, and all my people shall order themselves as you command. Only as regards the throne will I be greater than you.’ And Pharaoh said to Joseph, ‘See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt.’ Then Pharaoh took his signet ring from his hand and put it on Joseph’s hand and clothed him in garments of fine linen and put a gold chain about his neck. And he made him ride in his second chariot.***

And they called out before him, 'Bow the knee!' Then he set him over all the land of Egypt. Moreover, Pharaoh said to Joseph, 'I am Pharaoh, and without your consent no one shall lift up hand or foot in all of Egypt.' And Pharaoh called Joseph's name Zaphenath-Paneah. And he gave him in marriage to Asenath, the daughter of Potiphara priest of On. So, Joseph went out over the land of Egypt."

Stopping there for a moment: We see the progression of Joseph's life under the providence of God; from multi-color robe to misery, and now, to majesty! **While God is not the author of tragedy, pain, and suffering, He will permit terrible things to happen to all His will to be accomplished.** He uses both good and bad to bring Him glory and help us to develop and mature as His children. From the pit to become a prince, how do you think Joseph handled his promotion? Well, let's turn back to his story, picking up at verse 46: ***"Joseph was thirty years old when he entered the service of Pharaoh king of Egypt. And Joseph went out from the presence of Pharaoh and went through all the land of Egypt. During the seven plentiful years, the earth produced abundantly, and he gathered up all of these seven years, which occurred in the land of Egypt, and the food in the cities. He put in every city the food from the fields around it. And Joseph stored up grain in great abundance, like the sand of the sea, until he ceased to measure it, for it could not be measured. Before the year of famine came, two sons were born to Joseph. Asenath, the daughter of Potiphara the priest of On, born them to him. Joseph called the name of the firstborn Manasseh. 'For,' he said, 'God has made me forget all my hardship and all my father's house.' The name of the second he called Ephraim, 'For God has made me fruitful in the land of my affliction.' The seven years of plenty that occurred in the land of Egypt came***

to an end, and the seven years of famine began to come, as Joseph said. There was famine in all lands, but in all the land of Egypt there was bread. When all the land of Egypt was famished, the people cried to Pharaoh for bread. Pharaoh said to all the Egyptians, ‘Go to Joseph. What he says to you, do.’ So, when the famine had spread over all the land, Joseph opened all the storehouses and sold to the Egyptians, for the famine was severe in the land of Egypt. Moreover, all the earth came to Egypt to Joseph to buy grain, for the famine was severe over all the earth.”

Joseph had reached the highest level of power in the greatest kingdom in the world during this period in history. Pharaoh has placed him second-in-command and married him into the royal court. And how does Joseph respond? With gratitude, maybe he would have been right to resent everything that had happened; to complain that God took thirteen years to set things right. But he doesn't. Joseph recognized God's hand in his life. He realized that his plight was initiated by his brothers and propelled by Potiphar's wife. Thirteen years of misery and a meteoric ascent to majesty – all because of God. Joseph knew this. He understood this. He had been rescued; God had rescued him, and Joseph was thankful.

Max Lucado, in his book, *You'll Get Through This*, comments: *“Gratitude doesn't come naturally. Self-pity does. Bellyaches do. Grumbles and mumbles – no one has to remind us to offer them. Yet they don't mix well with the kindness we have been given. A spoonful of gratitude is all we need.”* (p. 92) Gratitude is hard to come by these days. People are so focused on the perceived “bad” things in life that they miss the blessings. Too many people live under a cloud of worry, anxiety, panic, fear; no news is good; it seems to be all “bad” stuff. We lost sight of God in the midst of the storm because we have elected to stop

looking for Him. People don't see blessings because they don't look for them.

Joseph knew God's steadfast love and blessings in his life, and he made sure he and his family would never forget them. When God gave Joseph two sons, he, in turn, gave them names that served as a reminder and testimony to God's providence and goodness. He named his sons Manasseh, which means, "**God made me forget,**" and Ephraim, which means "**God made me fruitful.**" Every time Joseph called out to his sons; he was reminded of God's goodness to him.

Is God that good to us despite circumstances? Paul says He is: "**What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died – more than that, who was raised – who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.**"

(Romans 8:31-34)

So, with the Psalmist and Joseph and Paul and all the saints who have gone before us, we declare in the midst of our direst circumstances, "**Oh give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever!**" (Psalm 106:1)

Amen.

Sermon Notes: Joseph – From *Misery* to *Majesty*

1. God's _____ care expresses itself
in wonderful and unusual ways.
2. Joseph was in the _____ place at the _____
time.
3. While God is not the author of _____, _____,
and _____, He will permit _____
things to happen to allow _____ to be accomplished.
4. Joseph recognized God's hand in his life: _____ =
"God made me forget"; _____ = "God made me
fruitful."
5. "If God is _____ us, who can be _____ us?"
– Romans 8:31